DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 812 EC 305 330

AUTHOR Pena, Marina
TITLE Organizing an ADHD Organization and Developing Programs for Teachers and Parents in a Small Country: Costa Rica as a Model.
PUB DATE 16 Nov 96
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (8th, Chicago, IL, November 14-16, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attention Deficit Disorders; Developing Nations; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Information Dissemination; *Inservice Teacher Education; Models; *Parent Education; Parent Participation; *Program Development; *Social Support Groups; Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the development of an attention deficit disorder (ADD) organization in Costa Rica that provides information, training, and support services to parents and teachers. The report also offers information on how to develop this type of organization. Resources used to help disseminate information about ADD are described, including the media, the church, and public institutions. The objectives and services of the organization are detailed. They encompass information dissemination, support and orientation services, and training programs that offer alternative intervention strategies by responding to the varied interests and needs of different populations. The report identifies the problems surrounding the acceptance of intervention strategies for ADD in the educational environment and the family environment, and outlines the training program's components. (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Organizing an ADHD Organization and Developing Programs for Teachers And Parents in a Small Country: Costa Rica as a Model

Fundación DA, San José, Costa Rica

ED 401 812

Costa Rica is a small democratic country located in Central America. Its population of three million lives within an area of approximately fifty thousand square kilometers. Costa Rica has a free and compulsory educational system and all workers and their families have access to social security services.

The country is divided into seven provinces. In each region, residents have access to the national health care system, through local primary health care services and hospital care in the provincial capitals.

In several of Costa Rica's hospitals, special teams have been established for the diagnosis and treatment of ADD. These teams offer training for parents as part of the treatment program. A high demand for their services has led the teams to decentralize their work by training ADD teams in local health clinics.

How did the Fundación DA originate?

A group of parents of children with ADD began meeting to discuss their concerns regarding its treatment and handling in various settings. With the input of professionals in education, psychology, and medicine, they identified the need to organize and give society a response to this latent and relevant issue.

Why organize?

After obtaining information about Attention Deficit Disorders and the way they affect a person's life, many parents begin to seek a response in their immediate surroundings. Unfortunately, they find that society is not prepared to meet this new demand. At the level of the family, there may be little acceptance of the person's condition primarily due to a lack of information. In the school environment, key actors are not prepared to intervene. At the level of diagnosis and treatment, we find that the services are inadequate to meet the rising demand. And in the legal and political context, there are no policies defined to address this area. Given this reality, the logical question is: What can be done?

This is where the need to organize as a group surfaces in order to stimulate the effective handling of ADD through the development of alternative intervention strategies within the school, family, community and policy environments. Changes can be launched and implemented only with the support of an organized group with vested interest in the issue.

EC305330

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M.P. Gonzalez
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What is an effective means of organizing?

Any project or initiative requires a high degree of motivation for its successful completion. That is why parents are the base of the organization, the driving force for change. They are the ones who are closest to reality and are aware of the impact of ADD on a person's life, on the family and society as a whole. Their participation must be complemented by the support and advice from professionals in the fields directly related to the issue, mainly psychology, education, and medicine.

Building our organization was like digging a small ditch in a large field. We began by informing parents. In the information we provided, they found the response they were looking for and generated a demand for the development of alternative actions at different levels. Once the parents were familiar with the subject, they began to seek the help of their child's teachers. The teachers, in turn, were motivated to solicit the training required to manage ADD in the classroom.

Likewise, the demand for diagnosis and treatment sparked the interest of the professionals. Public and private diagnostic centers turned their attention to ADD. Private schools began to develop intervention policies. The Ministry of Education also demonstrated interest in defining policies that adequately responded to the needs of ADD students.

If we had asked for help in the beginning, no one would have believed in us. An essential part of our strategy was to demonstrate the need for the program so that all parties would be motivated to collaborate.

How to establish effective intervention strategies?

A strategic plan

A strategic plan that analyzes and defines policies and programs is essential for the effective development of any organization. Motivation and volunteer resources are not enough. The plan should define the organization's reason for being, its mission, objectives, and programs. Likewise, it is important to assess the organization's environment, its internal weaknesses and strengths and its external risks and opportunities. Thus, we can be sure that program development responds to expressed needs, established policies and available resources. Through planning, the organization's members can create a vision not only of what the organization is today, but of what it wants to be tomorrow and what it wants to become in the future.

Where to begin?

If there is no knowledge there is no credibility. The need for services is latent in the environment, but few people propose a response. Information on the issue opens the door for many families.

Information is readily consumed by those who need it. It is important, however, to secure appropriate support and follow-up services before providing information on ADD and generating a demand for professional responses. The organization must be capable of satisfying people's expectations before setting to task of providing them with information.

Existing resources

Financial resources present the greatest barrier for the development of any of these not-for-profit organizations. For that reason, we place greater emphasis on taking advantage of available resources.

The media as a primary resource

The mass media provide the greatest support in the effort to inform the public. In our case, the parents involved in the organization were able to help establish contacts with radio, television and the printed press. We have taken advantage of every opportunity offered by the media to communicate information about ADD. Soon after we began our work, Attention Deficit Disorders became a subject of considerable public interest and many media organizations began to publish relevant articles or interviews. Because of its size and the widespread accessibility of the media, in Costa Rica we were able to reach a large percentage of the population.

The Church

About 98% of the country's population is Catholic. The Church is an important channel of communication and source of education for personal development. Within the Church, certain programs share our interest in informing people about ADD. For example, all Catholic children must receive catechism in preparation for their First Communion. It is an educational process in which parents also are involved. The Church has allowed us to provide parents with information through the catechism program. Our Foundation is based on the respect for individuals and their rights; given the principles we share with the Church, it is an important ally and resource for our programs.

Public Institutions

Social programs that are charged with protecting child, adolescent, and family welfare perceive the management of ADD as an issue that can have a significant impact on the populations they serve.

The Objectives and Services of the Fundación DA

The organization's objectives were defined during the strategic planning process. The purpose of the Fundación DA is to ELIMINATE THE INADEQUATE MANAGEMENT OF ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS. Its programs provide information, training, and support services.

Information

The most important component of our work is the dissemination of information. Through this program area, we give people the initial response that they seek. At the same time, we begin to establish other needs that should be addressed in the future by our programs.

Our information program consists of a basic presentation that contains general information about causes, diagnosis, and treatment of ADD. The talk is given to any group that calls to request it (schools, churches, community organizations, etc.) and is offered regularly each month in a set location in the capital city and in other provinces.

Over the phone, our office provides the general public with information about ADD and the available public and private diagnostic and treatment centers.

We also produce and distribute educational material on the subject.

Support

With the help of volunteer psychologists, support and orientation services are given to people with scarce financial resources.

The Fundación DA aorganizes monthly talks given by professionals in different disciplines related to ADD that are designed to provide additional support to parents whose children are currently undergoing treatment.

In addition, orientation and advice is given to institutions that wish to develop educational intervention strategies to respond to the needs of people with ADD.

Similar advice is provided to groups that wish to establish a support network to facilitate information sharing and services in their communities.

Training

The training program offers alternative intervention strategies that respond to the varied interests and needs of our target populations.

A complete training program for institutions includes:

1. A basic, introductory talk (motivational)
2. Seminar for parents
3. Seminar for educators
4. Advisory services to develop intervention strategies and policies (The Fundación DA has produced a set of guidelines for this process that require that parents be involved. The institution assumes the commitment to intervene and support the student, but parents should be active participants in the intervention strategy, beginning with training and

orientation on the subject of ADD. The Fundación DA facilitates these sessions within the institution through a support group for parents. In fact, many institutions now require that parents present their certificate of participation in the basic workshop offered by Fundación DA, before implementing policies to accommodate ADD students. This prerequisite has been established primarily in private schools.)

Currently, the Foundation's seminars are directed towards:
- parents of preschool and elementary school children
- parents of adolescents
- elementary school teachers
- high school teachers
- high school counselors

The seminars are given wherever they are requested.

The Fundación DA recently has called on the State to take a more active role. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, we are in the initial stages of establishing a national training program for teachers.

The basis for a training program for parents and teachers

The information generated by specialists on the subject has been extremely useful for the development of this program. The research findings clearly point to the effectiveness of intervention strategies that target behavioral modifications and the educational environment. Our training services emerged as a result of sharing this kind of information. The information has had a similar impact in all the communities we have visited--at every economic, cultural and social level. We have detected the following general responses to the information given:

<u>In the educational environment:</u>

The issue lacks credibility among educators
There are negative attitudes towards change
There are few resources and little time to implement an intervention
There are too many students and little motivation

<u>In the family:</u>

It is a difficult task
I do not have the patience
I have too few financial resources
There is no acceptance

These responses have dictated the course of the seminars; they are the reason that the program begins with a talk that motivates individuals on a personal level with the fundamental objective of sparking a change in attitude. The seminar is developed in way that allows participants to experience the conditions and circumstances faced by a person with ADD.

Basic Information

To know about ADD, its causes, diagnosis and treatment.

In this first stage, it is important to convince people of the existence of this problem, citing the history of its development and the results of recent research.

Personal Experience

Experience first hand the characteristics of ADD in a real-life situation.

To live for just a moment in the circumstances faced by many people with ADD, strengthens the conceptualization of the problem that was given in the information stage.

Consequences

Become familiar with the relevance that ADD has in the life of a person.

Referring to the scientific base, consider the impact of ADD on the person in family, school, and social environment.

Self-value (the role of the parent or teacher)

Motivate the self-information, raising of expectations, the level of esteem and stimulate an attitude of change.

Later, analyze the person as such and then in his/her role as educator and parent. It is important to identify the personal characteristics that could interfere with a future intervention.

The impact of the teacher or parent on the life of a person, especially in the formative years, must be kept in mind.

Basic needs of people with ADD

Establish expectations and a clear vision of the basic needs of these persons at an emotional, behavioral, and educational level.

The goal is to ensure that people are informed about the effective management of ALD at every level, thus facilitating adequate interventions.

Why should I intervene?

Become familiar with the goal of any intervention and the importance it will have in the lives of these people.

Become familiar with the goal of the intervention in order to motivate its implementation. It is important to recognize that interventions are usually designed to address education and other formative processes because this is considered the optimum means of addressing demands at each level.

Defining intervention strategies

Develop intervention strategies that are adequate and respond to the person's family and educational realities.

Adequate interventions within the family and school environments have been identified with the help of much research. Nevertheless, many people reject this information because they believe that it does not reflect the reality of their lives. That is why we suggest that alternative interventions be proposed by the participants themselves. In the end, the proposals they adopt are the same ones we offer, but because they are developed in response to a specific local situation, they are more widely accepted.

Evaluation of the program

The Fundación DA evaluates its efforts at the end of each activity to verify that program objectives are met. Evaluations show that 99% of parents and teachers respond positively, indicating that the training successfully met its objectives.

Teachers conclude "I discovered the relevance of my work as an educator...I believe that it is common to learn differently"... and the parents tell us "I believed that this situation would limit my growth, today I can say that it has actually helped me to grow."

We conclude that a **change in attitude can change a person's destiny. We continue working, motivated by this change...**

"The basis of any goal--and its achievement--is derived from the attitude of those who work towards it. "